



# Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

## *Parish Life Survey* Saint John the Baptist Parish Newburgh, Indiana

### Executive Summary

The St. John the Baptist Parish Life Survey was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. Most of the questions were derived from CARA's database of nationally tested questions, with some questions designed specifically for the parish. The parish distributed the questionnaire to those attending its liturgies over one weekend in November 2017. In all, there were 1,163 valid responses, with an additional five respondents under age 16 not included in the analysis.

Major findings can be summarized as follows:

#### Demographic Characteristics

- The average age of valid respondents to the in-pew survey at St. John the Baptist Parish is 56. Half are 57 or younger. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) are between ages 45 and 74.
- CARA divides Catholics into four generations, reflective of the age categories used by many other social scientists. The most common generations at St. John the Baptist Parish are the Vatican II (ages 57 to 74 in 2017) and Post-Vatican II (ages 36 to 56) Generations. Examining the generations by ethnicity, half of white or Anglo respondents (51%) belong to the oldest generations, compared to just over a third of those reporting other ethnicities (36%)
- Respondents were invited to choose one racial or ethnic identity as their primary one. Some 93% identify as white, Anglo, or Caucasian, 4% as Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% or less as either Hispanic or Latino(a) or another ethnic category.
- Fully 98% report English as the primary language used in their homes, 1% identify Spanish, and 1% identify Tagalog or Vietnamese.
- Nearly six in ten respondents to the survey are female (57%) and 43% are male. Eight in ten say they are currently married or remarried. One in ten has never married (10%), one in 20 is widowed (6%), and one in 20 is divorced or separated (4%). Some 27% report having at least one child or stepchild under age 18 living with them.
- One in six (17%) has attained a high school diploma or less, 25% have attended some college or have an associate's degree, and 58% have a bachelor's or graduate degree.

## Religious Characteristics of Respondents

- On average, respondents have attended the parish for 22 years, with half having attended 19 years or more. Non-white respondents are more likely than those identifying as white, Anglo or Caucasian to have attended the parish for 15 years or less (58% compared to 45%, respectively).
- Fully 82% identify the parish as their primary place of worship and say they are registered there. Eight percent say they regularly attend the parish but are *not* registered there and another 9% identify as visitors.

## Assessment of Parish Life and Needs

- Fully 97% give St. John the Baptist Parish overall a positive evaluation (“good” and “excellent” combined). Some 58% rate it as “excellent.”
- Eight in ten at least “somewhat” agree that they feel engaged in parish life, with 27% agreeing “strongly” that they do.
- Parish efforts to meet people’s spiritual needs receive an “excellent” rating from 41% of respondents.
- More than half of responding parishioners report being attracted to the parish “very much” by the following: its open and welcoming spirit (67%), the sense of belonging they feel there (60%), the quality of the liturgy (59%), and the quality of the preaching (57%).
- Formation for the parish’s children, ministry for youth and young adults, building the sense of community, and ministry for those grieving, sick or homebound are especially likely to receive high priority from respondents. Six-tenths to three-quarters give each “very much” priority.
- Respondents were also invited to choose from a predetermined list the three needs to which parish should give most priority. The three most commonly identified are children’s religious education or formation, youth ministry, and developing a parish sense of community.

## Leadership

- Nine in ten give a positive evaluation to the vision provided by parish leaders, with 43% rating it as “excellent.”
- Fully 58% “strongly” agree they would feel comfortable talking with the pastor. This is more than double the percentage CARA usually finds in its in-pew surveys.
- More than a third (36%) “strongly” agree that parishioners are encouraged to have a role in decision making at the parish.

## Worship

- Masses and liturgies in general receive a positive evaluation from 96% respondents. Nearly six in ten (58%) rate them as “excellent.”
- Some 69% rate the hospitality or sense of welcome at weekend Masses as “excellent.” Parish outreach to visitors and guests receives an “excellent” evaluation from 51% of respondents.
- Three in four (75%) give an “excellent” rating to the music in general at the parish. The homilies receive an “excellent” evaluation from 56%, with Millennials most likely to rate them highly.
- Seven in ten attend Mass at least once a week and another quarter attend almost every week. Mass attendance varies some by generation, with those of the older generations most likely to attend at least once a week. Fully 86% of those of the oldest generation attend at least weekly, followed by 72% of the Vatican II Generation, 65% of the Post-Vatican II Generation, and 61% of Millennials.

## Formation

- Parish efforts to educate parishioners in the faith receive a positive evaluation from nine in ten respondents, with 48% giving these efforts an “excellent” rating.
- Efforts to nurture parishioners’ relationship with Jesus Christ receive an “excellent” rating from 45% respondents.
- Some 36% say the parish is “excellent” at helping them practice gospel values in their daily lives. Three in ten rate efforts to offer a Catholic view on current issues as “excellent.”
- Two in ten say they have attended adult faith formation classes at the parish in the past five years.
- Three-quarters give “very much” priority to children’s religious education or formation (74%), with seven in ten giving as much priority to youth ministry (69%). Half say the parish should place “very much” priority on adult faith formation (50%).

## The Parish School

- Nearly nine in ten (88%) agree at least “somewhat” that they support having the parish school be one of the parish’s major priorities. Some 62% “strongly” agree that they support that.
- Among those with school-age children, half “strongly” agree that they intend to send their children to St. John the Baptist School through their eighth grade year.

- Those with school-age children who did *not* send them to the parish school were asked for the reasons they did not do so. Some 57% cited financial considerations or tuition costs, 52% cited the high quality of the local public schools, and 19% cited the quality of education at the parish school.

### Evangelization and Parish Outreach

- Efforts to spread the Gospel/evangelize receive a positive rating from 85% respondents. Some 36% give these efforts an “excellent” rating. However, the more involved respondents are with parish ministries and activities, the less likely they are to rate these efforts as “excellent.”
- When asked to evaluate parish outreach to 14 groups, respondents are most likely to give an “excellent” rating to outreach to visitors and guests, new parishioners, and children. They are least likely to give the same rating to outreach to single parents, inactive Catholics, single adults, and those divorced or separated.
- Respondents were asked to choose the top three groups to which the parish should give most priority for outreach. The three most commonly selected groups are teens, young adults, and inactive Catholics.
- Nearly half (46%) give an “excellent” rating to the parish’s outreach to new parishioners.
- Parish outreach to inactive Catholics receives an “excellent” rating from 21%. Nearly half (47%) give “very much” priority to reaching out to inactive Catholics.

### Stewardship

- More than nine in ten (94%) agree at least “somewhat” that they understand the concept of stewardship, with 60% agreeing “strongly” that they do.
- Efforts to encourage parishioners to share their time, talents and treasure with the parish receive a positive evaluation from nine in ten. Half rate these efforts as “excellent.”
- Parish efforts to invite participation in ministries receive an “excellent” evaluation from 46% of respondents.
- Just under four in ten (37%) indicate they are “very” likely to volunteer for a parish ministry in the next year.
- Excluding their attendance at Masses, nearly half of respondents are not involved with any ministries or activities at the parish. A quarter are involved with one and nearly three in ten are involved with two or more.

## Social Justice

- Outreach to and advocacy for those in need receives a positive rating from 91% of respondents. Some 48% rate these efforts as “excellent.”
- A third (33%) rate parish outreach to those sick or homebound as “excellent.” Visitation of the sick and homebound receives “very much” priority from 60% of respondents.
- Three in ten (29%) rate parish outreach to those in financial need as “excellent.” Providing opportunities for parishioners to help the needy receive “very much” priority from 65%.
- Having the parish actively promote peace and justice opportunities receives “very much” priority from 42% of respondents.
- No unmarried respondents with children or stepchildren under age 18 living with them evaluate parish outreach to single parents as “excellent.” A third (33%) evaluate that outreach as “good.”

## Sense of Community

- The sense of community within the parish receives a positive rating from nine in ten respondents. Some 47% give it an “excellent” rating.
- Developing a parish sense of community receives “very much” priority from 65% of respondents.

## Parish Communications

- Efforts to communicate with parishioners receive a positive evaluation from nine in ten respondents, with 46% rating these efforts as “excellent.”
- Some 37% “strongly” agree that they feel well informed about what goes on in the parish and 35% agree as strongly that they feel adequately informed about parish finances.
- Responding parishioners are particularly likely to say the following are “very” effective ways of communicating parish news to them: the Sunday bulletins (68%), inserts in the bulletins (60%), and announcements read at Mass (54%). Each of these is related to weekend Mass attendance.
- Among the electronic ways of communicating parish news, respondents are most likely to list email (36%), the parish website (31%), and social media (28%) as “very” effective.